Hale Gives Profile of Gussie Nell Davis

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By Sharon R. Cox Woman's Club Reporter

Kilgore Woman's Club members were treated to a brunch hosted by Mrs. Rosalee Floyd and Mrs. Carletta Burrows at the First Christian Church on April 23. They were served coffee, juice, quiche, fresh fruit, sausage balls and sausage links.

Announcements were made during the meal. The next meeting will occur in Roy H. Laird Country Club May 14. The last meeting of the club year will be a luncheon in the home of Mrs. Charla Hopkins. Following the brunch, the ladies enjoyed a program on Gussie Nell Davis, given by Mrs. Jeanne Hale in the parlor.

Mrs. Hale began her program on Miss Davis by stating that she regrettably missed Miss Davis' funeral as she was ill in bed. Mrs. Hale thought she would have the honor to eulogize her. The program she gave will stand as a late eulogy.

Gussie Nell Davis was born in the little town of Farmersville, Nov. 4, 1906, the youngest of four daughters. Miss Davis said she had four mothers growing up. Her mother was interested in music so at an early age, Gussie Nell took piano lessons. After she started school, her advanced intellect prompted teachers to early promote her to second grade. Soon, they wanted to promote her again, but her parents declined.

In her small hometown, the boys played football in a cow pasture while the girls lined the barbed wire fence cheering them on. She graduated from Farmersville High School at the age of 15 in 1921. She went to college at the all-female College of Industrial Arts at Denton (later Texas Woman's University). Her mother wanted her to become a concert pianist. However, her physical education classes were her favorite. One class was called "Folk Games" but was actually folk dancing. She graduated at the age of 19.

Her parents thought that she was too young to be out on her own so they sent her to her sister in California. She enrolled in the University of Southern California; and received a master's degree in one year at age 20. She accepted the position of physical education instructor and pep squad sponsor at Greenville High School At the time, she had no idea what a pep squad was. She soon had the girls marching intricate drills with

drums, bugles, and later batons. She decided to re-costume the girls, teach them to dance, and called them the Flaming Flashes.

Wishing to attract more girls to Kilgore College, in 1939 B.E. Masters hired Miss Davis to organize a girls support group. He also wanted to keep the football fans in the stands during halftime. She was given full reign to design a team of girls. She decided to combine precision military drill and dance and called her girls the Rangerettes. Her western style costumes did not match the drab dove grey and blue colors of the college but were a showstopping red, white, and blue with skirts a daring two inches above the knee.

There were no tryouts for the first line. She chose for captain Judy Lyle and the other girls from her P.E. classes. First, she chose girls with physical ability and a sense of rhythm. A girl's body was second and facial beauty almost never a consideration...

She surprised everyone at the first football game of 1940. The line did not arrive at the stadium until time to perform. At the end of the half, the stadium until time to perform. At the end of the half, the stadium lights went out and when they came back on, the girls were lined up on the field for the halftime show. The show was magnificent and a huge success. That success has continued nonstop for 40 years and has been seen around the globe. Miss Davis' life work was to instill in her girls qualities that would have lifetime benefits.

She instilled good manners and the ability to speak with persons of any age on a variety of current topic. She taught consideration for others. The stressed good posture. She insisted that Rangerettes be good students. Miss Davis insisted that the girls attend classes and practices without excuses. Only if she was in the hospital was a Rangerette excused. At rehearsals, Miss Davis was a drill sergeant.

Gussie Nell Davis was a person who cultivated friendship. She was extremely thoughtful and caring, Mrs. Hale. Gussie Nell had the ability to make someone feel that he or she was the most important person in the world. She was, however, completely human and sometimes held a grudge.

Miss Davis never married but was engaged at one time. The man wanted her to leave her work. She decided not to leave and never regretted the decision. In 1986, she was inducted into the Texas Woman's Hall of Fame.

Miss Davis retired in 1979. She has left a legacy of girls that are successful doctors, lawyers, teachers, parents, businesswomen and more. The alumni group, Rangerettes Forever, number about 800. With amassed funds of more than $800,000 in endowed and annual scholarships and operating funds, Rangerettes Forever is the single largest contributor to Kilgore College.